

BRUCELLOSIS

(Undulant fever, Malta fever, Mediterranean fever)

Frequently Asked Questions

(Last updated 5 May 11)

What is brucellosis?

Brucellosis is a bacterial zoonosis that can affect sheep, goats, cattle, deer, elk, pigs, dogs, and several other animals. Humans become infected by coming in contact with animals or animal products that are contaminated with the *Brucella* bacteria, commonly by eating or drinking contaminated milk products or by preparing or cleaning game after hunting.

Who gets brucellosis?

Everyone is susceptible to the bacteria and may get the disease if exposed. It is more likely to be found in slaughterhouse workers, meat inspectors, animal handlers, hunters, veterinarians and laboratorians.

How is brucellosis spread?

In the United States, brucellosis usually occurs by ingestion of unpasteurized milk and dairy products from infected animals. The bacteria can also infect humans through abrasions of the skin when blood, urine, vaginal discharges, aborted fetuses, and placentas of infected animals are handled. Hunting (especially feral swine) is also a risk factor. Inhalation of *Brucella* organisms is not a common route of infection but can be a hazard for slaughterhouse employees.

What are the symptoms of brucellosis?

Symptoms include irregular fever, headache, weakness, profuse sweating, chills, weight loss, depression, and generalized aching. The period of illness varies from several days to a year or longer without adequate treatment. Death is rare.

How soon do symptoms appear after infection?

The time period is highly variable, but symptoms usually appear within 5 to 60 days.

When and for how long is a person able to spread brucellosis?

Person-to-person spread of this disease is extremely rare.

Does past infection with brucellosis make a person immune?

It is not clear if infection produces lasting immunity. A small percentage of treated cases experience relapses over the following months or years.

What is the treatment for brucellosis?

A combination of antibiotics (rifampin or streptomycin, and doxycycline) for at least six weeks is the treatment of choice. Early diagnosis leading to prompt treatment is essential to prevent chronic infection.

How can brucellosis be prevented?

Pasteurization of all dairy products and prevention of contact with infected cattle, sheep, swine, or goats will reduce the risk of infection. Hunters and animal herdsman should use



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rubber gloves when handling viscera of animals. No approved human vaccine is available.

Links:

- CDC Brucellosis - http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/brucellosis_g.htm
- CDC Brucellosis Technical Information - http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/brucellosis_t.htm
- US Department of Agriculture, National Center for Animal Health Programs-Brucellosis - http://www.aphis.usda.gov/animal_health/animal_diseases/brucellosis/